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POEM.

A Hundred Years



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A HUNDRED YEARS.

One hundred busy years ! How much they mean !
What mighty revolutions have they seen !
What progress of the arts ! What progress of the pen !
What breaking down of wrong ! What lifting up of men !

Well may we boast our victories nobly won ;
Our rapid progress towards the setting sun ;
Our broad domain—its every acre free,
Stretching its giant arms from sea to sea ;
Our white-winged commerce o'er the stormy brine ;
Our wealth of prairie, forest, farm and mine ;
And, more than these—what still the spirit fires,
Those sterling virtues of our noble sires,
Which wedded them to freedom as to life,
In face of frowns and threats and deadly strife,
And held them to their self-imposed decree
To pay no sordid tax on British tea.
They stood as stands the rock upon the shore
When angry waves around it foam and roar ;
And, bending not before the tyrant's blow,
Hurled swift defiance back upon the foe.

You know the rest. Their stubborn, plucky will
Brought Concord, Lexington and Bunker-Hill.
It brought stern war ; and men with bated breath
Saw the destroyer, red with fire and death,
Stalk through the land to lay the fairest low

And scatter wide the direful seeds of woe.
 But, "where there is a will there is a way,"
 And so there dawned at last, a better day.
 Patient endurance! Ah! it conquers still!
 It forms the climax of a manly will!
 It foiled the evil purposes designed
 And gave a new born Nation to mankind.
 Nay, more! unknown it held at its command
 These hundred years of progress in its hand:
 These years of toil and growth, all richly fraught
 With schools, and churches, and unfettered thought—
 A precious gift, a princely, royal dower,
 Of onward progress and advancing power!

The age is "fast," and whatsoever lingers
 Is rudely thrust aside by nimbler fingers.
 Life's panorama of eventful range
 Glitters with visions of amazing change.

Our mothers with the needle slowly wrought,
 Chatting with children or absorbed in thought:
 Patient, persistent, grave perhaps, or gay,
 Obedient to their needs they stitched away,
 And our good households, in those olden days,
 Attest the merits of their faithful ways.
 But, times have changed. Behold another scene!
 List to the pacing click of that machine!
 Follow the needle—if, perchance, the eye
 Can catch its motions as the stitches fly
 See how the stuff moves on all neatly sewed,
 Trending its wonted way as on a road,
 Corded, or hemmed, or gathered, as you please,
 And moving forward with surpassing ease,
 Its stitch the very magic of our times,
 More deftly woven than our magic rhymes.

Those homely methods could not always last;

The "good old times" must drop into the past.
 The nimble knitting on a wintry night,
 Around the blazing fire, cheerful and bright;
 The twirling spindle, and the maiden's tread,
 As, with a whirl, she drew the tiny thread;
 The beam and shuttle of the household loom—
 Which had its corner or its special room;
 The flax and distaff of the "little wheel;"
 The winding into knots upon the reel;
 Are household pictures faded and gone by;
 And, in their place a thousand spindles ply,
 A thousand looms, moved by some mountain stream
 Or, ready, busy, many-handed steam.

Steam is our hand-maid, faithful, deft and strong,
 That pushes fast the moving world along.
 It speeds the shuttle, spins the spindle round;
 Wheels monstrous burdens o'er the graded ground;
 Brings iron from the mine, and coal and lead;
 Lifts rocks and metals from their mountain bed;
 Rolls out our iron, beats the pond'rous trip;
 Hammers and saws and sails the fastest ship;
 Stitches our garments, ploughs for unsown seed,
 And prints the Daily Paper which we read.

The Daily Paper, now in every hand,
 Sheds light and knowledge through the teeming land
 And we behold the PRESS a ruling power,
 Grown stronger by the change of every hour.

The wooden Ramage, working without stint,
 For our good sires a hundred sheets might print
 Within the hour. Long since it passed away.
 A thing most useful, it has had its day.
 Oh, FRANKLIN! couldst thou from thy sleep arise!
 What thrilling wonder! what enwrapped surprise!
 Thy sympathetic breast would surely know

While gazing on a mammoth, working HOE !
 Heavy and strong, and moving with a will,
 It whirls and rattles like a cotton-mill,
 And many a snowy *bank* piled hugely high,
 And many a hand is taxed for its supply;
 And, Oh ! Amazing ! it with ease completes
 Within the hour, full twenty thousand sheets.

So, too, of old, the painter slowly wrought.
 With his good eye the face or scene he caught,
 And then with color, brush, and master skill
 Proceeded patiently his sketch to fill.
 Few walls were garnished then with works of art ;
 Few pictures graven—save upon the heart.
 But, since DAGUERRE, no painter like the sun ;
 Who takes our portraits almost on the run ;
 Whose brush of rays with color overflows
 And every ardent look a picture shows.
 To rich and poor he gives his genial ray,
 And gems for all are radiant every day.
 Companions, lovers, parents, children, all ;
 The poor man's Cottage and the rich man's Hall,
 Attest the largeness of the painter's will,
 And share the bounties of his matchless skill.

In "seventy-six," if Post-man 'did not fail,
 Letters went slowly in the weekly mail ;
 And, if demands more urgent chanced to press
 Relays of horses proved a fleet express.
 Behold what change ! With rail and steam combined
 And daily mails, the news would lag behind
 But for those magic wires which stretch afar,
 On which the lightning drives his unseen car.
 His flying coursers sweep along their way,
 O'er land and sea, by darkness and by day,
 Now, down beneath the ocean's surging tide,

On the long cable through the deep they ride,
 Now, mounting on the endless net of wires,
 On, on, with speed that never flags or tires,
 Counting all time and distance as but naught,
 Leaping or flying, as a flash or thought,
 To bring from every land subdued by man,
 From England, Egypt, China and Japan,
 The news, like manna, gathered fresh and sweet
 To be reported in the daily sheet.

The fastest travel in the olden age
 Was in the rocking, bounding, four-horse stage,
 Which, swinging, jolting, as it rolled along
 Behind its heavy horses, slow and strong.
 Full often pausing to obtain the mail
 Or fresher horses, as the worn ones fail,
 Could, in its steady trend of night and day
 Scarce make its hundred miles of weary way.
 The driver was a man of conscious power,
 Of business air and prompt to day and hour,
 Who answered questions and would oft expand
 On title deeds and ownership of land,
 Or village gossip, tales and local lore—
 And, Oh! the bundles, messages and notes he bore!
 Missiles of business, love, and strange embraces;
 Of shows and auctions, trainings and the races;
 And when his mellow horn blew loud and clear
 To sound a warning that the stage was near,
 A crowd of gossips, thus informed before,
 Would meet in knots around the tavern door,
 To get their papers, notes or other dues,
 Or see the team, or hear or tell the news.
 He, like a royal sovereign, had his throne,
 From which he ruled his princely realm alone;
 And, when he gathered up his double reins,
 That magic power that governs and restrains,

No Emperor, with high, imperial will,
 Could wield his stately power with better skill.
 His watchful subjects, mindful of his way,
 Bent all their humors to his fitful sway,
 And if, perchance, in aught they seemed to lack,
 The long lash quivered with a thundring crack,
 While every muscle trembled at the sound,
 And every hoof was ready to rebound.

Those days have gone. The stage has passed away :
 And, in its place, the level, iron way
 Bears on its track the stream of busy life
 That sweeps with currents strong as human strife.
 The iron horse with glowing embers fed,
 Paces, impatient on his graded bed
 And breathing smoke and sparks of glowing fire
 Suggests a demon or some monster dire,
 But, kindly treated, on his trusty road,
 No ox is half so patient of his load.
 With scores of laden cars bound to his train
 He bears our freight and travel o'er the main,
 Laughs at all toil and, with Herculean power,
 Wheels off his load at sixty miles an hour.

In morals, too, the ever waging strife
 Bears hard upon the hoary wrongs of life.—
 Strange ! that our sires who pledged their all to be
 From every foreign power so nobly free,
 Should not have spurned the caffle and the chain
 And banished slavery from their wide domain !
 But, no : alas ! For twenty shameful years
 The licensed slave-trade filled the land with tears.
 And when, at last, the foreign traffic o'er,
 Our ships their stolen freight no longer bore,
 Bondmen at home, scourged to reluctant toil,
 With sweat and blood bedewed our virgin soil.

Then followed strife which promised no repose
 Till the black crime was beaten out by blows.
 Fierce, and more fierce, the angry contest raged
 Till its wild fury all our STATES engaged ;
 And slavery, beaten oft, " pushed to the wall,"
 Met, on a field of blood, its final fall.

Oh, direful war ! destruction in thy hand !
 The sword, the torch awaiting thy command !
 Engine of Tyrants, since the world began,
 To build up Empire and belittle man !
 Begetting woes no tongue can ever tell,
 And breathing sulphur from the pit of hell !
 Thou com'st in mercy when thou com'st to save !
 Thou com'st an angel— to redeem the slave !

Within the cycle of these hundred years
 What clouds disperse ! What darkness disappears !
 What explorations science has begun !
 What triumph after triumph has it won !
 The moon and stars that gem the arch of night
 Are caught in shades of photographic light :
 The golden sun, that royal fount of day,
 That drives his fiery car so far away,
 Is not so far but science can evoke
 His hidden secrets with the spectroscope ;
 And the deep sea, far down beneath its waves,
 Can hold no more the treasures of its caves.

'Twere well, perhaps, that science, sound and slow,
 Meant only what the mind could surely know.
 And were content in looking on creation
 To see behind the CAUSE *of all causation*.
 But science, proudly grown, no God confesses,
 And builds the Universe on slender guesses.
 The nebulae that shine to us from far
 Are loose materials of a forming star ;

The rings of Saturn, circling round their globe,
 That walk the azure in their silver robe,
 Are denser matter, hindered on its way
 To join the planet, where it is to stay ;
 While a thin ether, which the earth embraces,
 Filling afar the interstellar spaces,
 Is improvised to bear the flashing ray
 That brings, in wave like throbs, the golden day ;
 And life, in all its forms, finds quick solution,
 In Spencer's solvent—endless evolution.

Huxley and Darwin follow Spencer's lead
 And TYNDALL well expounds the common creed.
 He with a trustful faith, sublimely firm,
 Traces all life "to one primordial germ ;"
 And all he needs the gravest doubts to scatter
 Is to "define anew existing matter ;"
 When, to his mind, the reason will be plain
 That any God in Nature is in vain ;
 That man came up through insect, toad, and donkey
 To reach, at length, the status of a monkey :
 And, changing slowly, as a monkey can,
 Rubbed off his tail and found himself a man.

How kind in science thus to let us know
 From what beginnings thought and mind can grow !
 For, if a germ, from its minute perfection,
 Can rise, by evolution and selection,
 To be an ape ; and thence in ages can
 By more selection, grow to be a man,
 Then, man, touched often by this Aaron's rod,
 Will, by selection, grow to be a God.

A hundred years ago where was the West ?
 The migrant's hopeful home, the settler's rest ?
 The Alleghanies were our bounding zone ;

And all beyond was mystery —unknown.
 That mighty valley, now with states bestud,
 Through which the Mississippi rolls its flood,
 Was tangled woods and wild uncultured lands,
 Roamed by fierce beasts and naked, savage bands ;
 The golden-coast, with all its treasures rare ;
 Its mighty trees ; its mountains ribbed and bare ;
 Its rapid rivers choked with water-falls ;
 Its gloomy canons with their rocky walls ;
 Its mines of gold and silver, salt and clay ;
 Its famous city and unequalled bay :
 Its deep Yosemite, encased in stone—
 Were in the distant future—blank, unknown.

A hundred years ago, just as to-day,
 The broad Potomac swept its devious way,
 And dear Mount Vernon from its sheltering wood
 Looked down, as now, upon the moving flood.
 But Washington with all its towers and domes,
 Its gilded palaces and humble homes,
 Has nestled down upon its river shore
 Long since the war for liberty was o'er.
 And, far and near, on river, lake and plain,
 From sea to sea, in all this grand domain,
 Thus cities rise to mark the rolling years,
 And thrifeful progress everywhere appears.

As through the clouds a gleam of light will play,
 And, glinting backward, paint reflected day,
 So, through the past, reflected we may see,
 Glimpses of what our future years will be.
 But glimpses only ; for the clouds still hide,
 And naught can draw the dusky veil aside.
 But who can doubt, if thus the past appears,



Our country's glory in the coming years?
Its happy homes with grace and culture crowned,
Where light, religion, faith and truth abound,
Its teeming millions living more and more
For that great FUTURE lying just before ;
And its strong arm stretched out to shield and save
The struggling nations that are true and brave.
So may it be ! Its armor ever bright,
Its sword drawn only to maintain the right.

WASHINGTON, D. C., 1876.

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